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ABSTRACT

This speech begins with a discussion of broad social and political patterns and trends that are currently developing and continues to the specific unresolved social issues which will affect the nature and structure of educational systems. Those issues seen by the author is most likely to produce the greatest amount of activity are integration, the urban fiscal crisis, the puralistic society vs the "meltingpot" concept, urban-suburban mandated court decisions, and students' quests for relevant educational experiences. The author focuses on the key issues of the social expectations for education and the political interpretations of these expectations. He contends that, to rectify the situation in which each school is made the focal point for the fulfillment of an unmanageable amount of social expectations and demands, three alternatives are possible. These alternatives are to (1) increase governmental funding to provide necessary resources to meet the expectations; (2) eliminate some expectations; and (3) retain the expectations but recognize that a single school cannot meet them and combine a central school with satellite specialized schools that offer varied academic, social, and pedagogical orientation. The paper focuses much of its comment on the state of and expectations for education in Massachusetts.
(Author/MLF)

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FORCES AFFECTING EDUCATIONAL DECISIONS

By

NEIL V. SULLIVAN

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

There are three fundamental reasons for considering various social, political, cultural and personal influences on education in the course of educational planning. First of all, this society has made an enormous emotional investment in the power of the public schools to effect, for the better, the structure and quality of life for both the individual client and the larger society. Implicit in this investment is a set of social expectations and demands on our public schools. These expectations and demands must be our starting point, for, rightly or wrongly, the utility and effectiveness of the final plan is largely a function of its ability (actual and perceived) to fulfill these expectations. No matter how rational, precise, or technically superb we are, if we neglect these expectations and demands we are courting ineffectiveness, disregard and futility. For example, if there is a strong social expectation that the school will provide all its students with some marketable skills

at the technician level and yet the plan we present includes no provision for the appropriate facilities, instructors, programs or funds necessary to meet this demand, then it is an unsuccessful plan and one which is certain to meet with considerable resistance. So let us reiterate the fact that a successful plan is one that takes into account both present and anticipated social expectations and demands.

The second rationale for considering the aforementioned influences on education arises from the fact we are almost always confronted with the problem of fulfilling a variety of social expectations in the face of limited and often inadequate human, material and financial resources. Were these resources unlimited or at least abundant, our task would be relatively easy in that it would involve simply the allocation of existing resources, in the needed amount, to pre-determined categories. In the more realistic situation, however, where the requisite resources are indeed scarce, some conscious choices as to where and in what amount existing

resources will be allocated must be made. At present the curriculum planner is generally not entrusted with the responsibility for making these choices, rather his role is generally perceived to be that of a competent technician who can establish the most efficient and effective method of allocating resources into those categories others have established as priorities. Establishing these priorities is the responsibility of the policy maker and, most often in education these decisions are made, not on objective rational criteria, but rather on a ranking, in terms of strength, of the various social expectations and demands present. It is important to remember that these priorities are a function of social expectations and demands not rationalistic criteria (though, of course, these categories are not mutually exclusive). For example, one often sees the situation in which there is a school which is seriously deficient in its academic program, facilities, staff and funding; yet it maintains and supports an extensive, sophisticated, and expensive program of sports. Rationally, this

particular pattern of resource allocation may seem to be highly disproportionate and inappropriate to "real, objective" need of the school's clients for a greatly improved academic program, yet, if there is a very strong social demand for this "unbalanced" pattern there is, realistically, little the educational planner can do other than accept this fact and plan accordingly. For, a planner who proposes a pattern of resource allocation, no matter how objectively reasonable or "correct," which runs counter to the pattern dictated by social demand is one who not only is likely to fail but is also one who has exceeded the limitations of his role. Priorities for resource allocation are determined by social demand, not planners; thus it behooves the planner to be intimately aware of the social expectations and demands being made on the system he is trying to plan.

The third major rationale for the planner paying close attention to social, political, cultural and personal influences on education is the fact that almost all projections that the

planner makes have, at their foundation, a set of assumptions about both present and anticipated conditions and demands of the population and system with which they are concerned. Changes in these particular spheres of influence such as new laws, more birth control, less demand for educational services, etc., can all significantly alter the correctness of the projection assumptions and thus, the accuracy and reliability of the projections themselves.

In this society public educational institutions have traditionally acted as a reactive rather than proactive force, particularly in regard to significant social changes. It is our basic contention that there is a very high positive correlation between trends in the larger society and trends in education, i.e. as society becomes more permissive so do schools or when society places a high priority on efficiency suddenly the schools accord efficiency a similarly high priority. This is not to suggest that

educational institutions must and/or should continue to function in this manner; rather it is merely a statement of historical fact. Thus, given our expectation that this reactive posture will continue unabated, it seems incumbent upon us to examine some of the larger social developments and changes to which educational institutions are likely to be reacting in the next seven years. And, as we begin to discuss trends in society it should be remembered that there are likely to be corollaries of those same trends in our educational institutions.

The decade of the 1960's can be characterized as a time of intense domestic turmoil, confrontation, and polarization. Thus far, however, the 1970's have been relatively passive in terms of domestic affairs. It is our conjecture that this docility is much more a function of a national mood of caution, disillusionment, and restraint than it is a sign of either general support for and belief in the present domestic policies or widespread apathy toward the myriad of unresolved social, cultural, and political issues that

continue to face this nation. In other words, it is not that we, as a society, have basically solved our problems, nor have we ceased to care; rather it is our seeming inability to create and implement truly effective social change strategies which lie at the heart of the current national malaise. Rioting, mass demonstrations, local protests, boycotts, strikes, new legislation, new blood in government, charisma, court decisions, leaders, martyrdom, consciousness raising, etc., etc., etc., all proved to be disappointingly ineffective strategies, particularly in the long run, for bringing about desired social changes.

Thus, it is appropriate and far from surprising that we made Richard Nixon our President. Electing and reelecting Richard Nixon and all he represents is, perhaps more than anything else, an implicit national statement of resignation, that is, the electorate seemed to be saying "If we can't or won't change our society, let us at least make sure it is well managed." Indeed, we believe that this call for efficient management of national

affairs is the real mandate with which Richard Nixon enters his second term. It is one mandate we are confident he will accomplish. The results of this mandate are already observable, as the following four domestic policy trends illustrate:

1. Deacceleration, if not outright reversal, of trends and programs aimed toward promoting social change. This has been demonstrated primarily through significant shrinkage of federal "social" funds and elimination of many "social programs."

2. Placement of highly regarded, i. e. efficient, managers in the top federal domestic posts.

3. Domestic action only on those problems which are perceived to be primarily administrative/managerial in nature, for example, efforts to "straighten out the welfare mess."

4. Shift from the obvious "errors of commission" such as the War on Poverty that characterized the '60's to

the much subtler "errors of omission" which typify the '70's thus far, in terms of domestic policy. In other words, Nixon, in accordance with his mandate, has by and large replaced bad programs with no programs.

Though the upcoming Supreme Court decision on the financing of education may force alterations, the trend within the federal government regarding education is consistent with Nixon's mandate, that is, efficient management of the status quo, disengagement from a proactive position in the process of social change, and considerably less total federal involvement in education in terms of both leadership and money.

Given events like McGovern's victory in Massachusetts, there are those who would assert that that state has somehow avoided or overcome the prevailing national shift toward conservatism. A closer examination, however, will reveal that Massachusetts is just lagging a bit behind the rest of the nation and is, in fact, closing the gap. Massachusetts in the 1960's was a leader and somewhat

ahead of the national mood toward liberalism. At present there is a larger discrepancy between the nation and the state, yet, by 1975, though still more liberal than the rest of the nation, Massachusetts will have taken a distinctly conservative turn. In other words, Massachusetts is shifting in accordance with the national mood yet not to the same degree nor with the same intensity. The signs of this shift toward conservatism and efficiency in Massachusetts are already in evidence; for example, Governor Sargeant's reorganization plan to make the state bureaucracy become more streamlined, efficient, and $90 million less costly, and Boston's Mayor White's austerity program with tight budget restrictions, reduction of municipal employees and programs, and efforts to maintain a tax rate under $200. Both of these budget programs are aimed at lowering the level and scope of services provided, and both sets of proposals are obviously much more in accordance with Nixon's aforementioned mandate than they are with the activist and expansionist proposals

that typified the '60's. While we are not in any way intending to place value judgments on this shift toward the maintenance of a trimmed down status quo, we do recognize that the success of a widespread program of budget cutting is highly contingent on the skill of those doing the cutting. Done properly, such cuts become similar to the skillful pruning of top-heavy tree in which the needless branches are eliminated and the whole tree becomes healthier for the effort. Done improperly, however, these cuts would more closely resemble open heart surgery done with a butcher's knife from which the recovery rate is not very good.

In general though, it seems reasonable to expect that the implications for education in Massachusetts will approximate the implications for the nation as a whole; shrinking funds, less innovation, more management/efficiency orientation, etc.

To this point, we have only discussed very broad social and political patterns and trends that are developing at present. Obviously though within those broad patterns there are specific

unresolved social issues within our society which will affect, to varying degrees, the nature and structure of our educational systems. In accordance with our assumption that public educational institutions in this country are unlikely to initiate solutions, but will instead react under pressure from various interest groups or stress conditions, it seems logical to attempt to rank several of these problem areas in terms of the amount of influence they are likely to exert.

Those issues which seem likely to produce the greatest amount of activity are:

A. Integration -- the country is greatly divided in terms of how to deal with the law and placate the people.

B. The Urban fiscal crisis and the issue of how best to finance education.

C. The pluralistic society as opposed to the myth of the melting pot.

D. Urban - suburban mandated court decisions.

E. The students' quest for a relevant educational experience and the unrest produced by frustration of this desire.

A second, less emotionally tinged group of issues also seems certain to have an effect on the directions for education:

A. There is likely to be a redefinition of the American woman and a change in the roles she is permitted to play.

B. Universal mass higher education and the issue of education as a civil right.

C. The environment, earth sciences and the energy crisis.

D. Alternative and communtiy schools as either pace-setters or threats to the established system.

E. Child Care.

Finally, there is a third group of issues which, even if resolved, seem least likely to produce fundamental

change in the way educators do things:

A. Unemployment.

B. Leisure -- how to deal with it in enormous amounts.

C. Welfare (and socialistic reforms adopted by the society).

D. Coming of age of the technocratic society.

E. Returning veterans from the Vietnam War.

F. The role of the family in American society.

Given the enormity of the task of analyzing the social, political, cultural, and personal influences on education, it seems sensible to limit the discussion from this point on to the issue we consider to be the key one, that is, social expectations for education and the political interpretations of those expectations.

There are two trends which have dominated this area of social expectations for the past thirty years. The first trend is one which has accompanied our nation's continuing growth and

sophistication. Basically, it is the trend to make formal that which was formerly informal; to make explicit that which was formerly implied; and to centralize that which was formerly localized. For example, the schools that used to help feed hungry students on an informal basis now are forced to have a formal, bureaucratic, centralized, hot lunch program. Or, for another example, there used to be an implicit assumption that there was a strong relationship between a child's schooling and his eventual occupation; yet, today schools are beginning to initiate extensive and explicit programs in career education.

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish this trend from the second. Put simply, this second trend has been toward making education the "dumping ground" or "institution of last resort" for any task, attitude, or skill which other social institutions have failed to successfully impart or perform in their own right. Thus, as the influence of the church waned in this country,

educational institutions suddenly became formally responsible for a child's moral and ethical development; thus, as the civil rights movements, Congress, and the courts all failed to create a truly egalitarian and integrated society, schools, by law, suddenly assumed the responsibility for desegregation and became the focal point and chief hope for achieving a desegregated society through desegregated schools; thus, as both families and the health professions abdicated some of their responsibilities, schools, as a result of social pressure, suddenly became the primary formal centers for instruction in hygiene, sex, health, and drug education, psychological counseling and referral for family social services; thus, as the economic structure of our society failed to provide equality in income distribution and socio-economic status, schools became the last major hope of the disadvantaged in their efforts toward achieving socio-economic parity; and, thus, as it was realized that different children needed different kinds of education

(for some a consumer orientation, for some a vocational or employment orientation, and for some an academic orientation), it was decided every school should provide these various options for each and every child it served.

And when these societal trends toward formalizing the informal and using education as a dumping ground linked up with the trend among professional educators (led by Harvard's James Conant) toward "comprehensive schools," the results were eminently clear.

As a result, many of our schools became unfocused, unstable, inefficient, ineffective and irrelevant, both to the needs of a given child and to the needs of the larger society.

As the goals and sense of purpose become increasingly confused and contradictory, the attempt to make one school with the same old line faculty, all things to all people, without completely retraining the staff, and with already limited resources far too thin results in providing few things for most people.

Widespread disillusionment and disappointment with schools were and are caused to a large extent by the failure of educators to effectively deal with this conflict between rising social expectations for education and inability to retool the staff properly with diminishing resources with which to meet these new expectations.

Let's face it! The comprehensive school was and is a marvelous concept in a pluralistic society. It was meant to eliminate the small, totally inefficent neighborhood school that served, at best, middle class children who could be grouped homogeneously and needed few school resources because they were provided in abundance in most of their homes.

We gave many of our large high schools a new classification -- "Comprehensive" -- but we continued to track students based on questionable ability grouping practices. We added a vocational program or two, failed to equip them with modern tools and located them in a converted basement area.

These social expectations often become directly translated into social demands. In the case of education, the general populace expected and then demanded that a given school perform functions, provide services, and impart information and attitudes of an enormously broad and divergent nature. Needless to say, particularly in light of the limited resources at their disposal, schools have been largely unable to either satisfy or even cope with these social demands.

In order to rectify this situation in which each individual school is made the focal point for the fulfillment of an unmanageable amount of social expectations and demands, there are three basic alternatives. The first alternative would consist of an effort by all levels of government to try and fulfill all the expectations by closing the gap between resources needed and resources available. This would involve a massive infusion of new resources from the state and federal governments to all local school

districts. The second alternative involves demonstrating that some of these expectations for education are unquestionably unreasonable and, thus, should be eliminated as active demands. In the third and final alternative all the current expectations and demands would remain intact but with the position taken that a single school is not the proper vehicle for fulfilling these demands.

In light of a prevailing mood of skepticism regarding the value of massive new resource allocation for social programs, including educational ones (led by President Nixon's distain for "throwing dollars at social problem"), it seems highly unlikely that the first alternative will be employed.

It also seems clear to us that the second alternative, i.e. significantly reducing social expectations and demands, is not likely to succeed, particularly within the constraints of the time frame we are considering. It appears to us that the enormous investment this society has made in the power of educational

institutions to fulfill all their expectations is fundamentally an emotional rather than rational one. Thus, we are not confident that a rationalistic approach to the question of what schools can and/or should do is likely to have much immediate effect on what actually ends up being expected and demanded. Again, it should be noted that we are not judging the desirability of this situation, rather we are only putting it forward as a most likely reality.

The recent work of Jencks, et.al., as expressed in the book Inequality, offers a clear illustration of the point we are trying to make here. Jencks' basic assertion is that it is unreasonable for individuals in this society, particularly those among the ranks of the disadvantaged, to expect that socio-economic equality can be achieved through education. In the book, Jencks builds a very elaborate, statistical, rational case for his assertions, which include the final recommendations that, first,

schools should primarily be fun places without most of these serious expectations placed on them, and, second, that economic equality can only be achieved by reform of this society's economic mechanisms and institutions.

While these assertions may well be true in some objective sense, our consensus is that they will be patently ignored by the general populace and, hence, fundamentally irrelevant in the determination of societal expectations and demands for education. The reasons for this reaction are not difficult to discern. Basically, his assertions and recommendations will be ignored because they not only suggest solutions at a level of operations at which most people (and especially our disadvantaged citizens) are neither comfortable nor competent but they also run directly counter to the massive emotional investment these same people have made in our educational system.

Most lower-and middle-class people in this society have as a primary life aspiration, social mobility and personal economic

growth (as well as their concomitant amenities) both for themselves but especially for their children. Their willingness to be contributing, conforming, and productive citizens is largely a function of their sense of hope and their belief that these goals of heightened socio-economic status, especially for children, can, in fact, be realized. Obviously, this sense of hope has to be translated into a tangible, pragmatic, and, most importantly, understandable form in order to sustain the belief of this population. Schools, for a variety of reasons of only marginal importance here, have been this society's major manifestation and embodiment of this hope for socio-economic improvement. Thus, no matter how "rational," "correct." or well-documented Jencks' work may be, it will be ignored because it functionally eliminates education as the embodiment of this sense of hope without offering an alternative with which most middle-and lower-class individuals can cope. For schools, despite widespread criticism of their isolation from the community they ostensibly serve, are at least something that community members have come to understand,

and increasingly, something over which they have felt at least a modicum of conscious influence, if not control.

No such understanding, belief in, or perceived influence exists for this population in regard to the economic mechanisms and institutions which Jencks considers to be a more legitimate and reasonable focal point for efforts aimed at achieving socio-economic mobility. Thus, this combination of the general populace's dual feelings of skepticism and powerlessness regarding economic institutions and the deep reluctance of those who control these institutions to acquiesce to the interests and influence of the general populace would lead to a situation in which this sense of hope for economic parity would be all but crushed. Given both the primacy of this hope in the lives of our lower-and middle-class citizens and the fact that this population is, as a whole, at least marginally dissatisfied and disillusioned with the present structure of American society, the destruction of this social expectation carries with it the potential

for creating social disorder, the magnitude of which could be severe indeed. So,while it does continue a difficult and perhaps unreasonable demand on our nation's schools, it is perhaps fortunate that Jencks will be ignored. Taking away something which is vital to the general populace without offering a suitable and realistic replacement is perhaps an excellent way of inducing social unrest, but it seems quite unsatisfactory as a method of inducing proactive and constructive social change and development.

Therefore, if in the next seven years any significant progress will be made in closing the gap between current social expectations for education and the current inability of our schools to fulfill these expectations, we feel it will develop through the third alternative, that of finding a suitable replacement for the notion that all these varied expectations can be fulfilled with existing financing and within the confines of a single "Comprehensive" school.

What we are once again urging is massive involvement of

the entire community in setting priorities based on complete knowledge of how much money is available. This means a breakdown of the budget in a manner that will reveal where every last dollar is now being spent.

It means involving teachers, students and citizens in understanding what the social demands are and then whether, with limited dollars, these special programs should continue to be funded.

We suggest further that we move from the comprehensive school to the development of a satellite system -- we retain the large central school for only certain functions and each student will relate to it during part of the day and week. In its place we would substitute more specialized schools which offer varied academic, social and pedagogical orientation. A key to the success of such a program must be complete utilization of all community facilities and resources. New York State's BOCES program was a step in this direction and the Massachusetts Open Campus program a giant step in the same direction.

We can see at least spiritual counterparts of this development in the current interest in alternative schools, technical institutes, education voucher systesm, external degree programs, etc. The basic notion of this development is one of meeting the highly variant social demands on education with a highly varied, highly focused collection of schools within a given school system. For the past couple of years the Berkeley, California, school system has attempted to employ this approach and has been moderately successful in doing so. Certainly there have been porblems in Berkeley, some of them operational and some of them intrinsic to this whole methodology; yet the results thus far have been both encouraging and well known, enough so that we now have hundreds of districts from Maine to California using a modified version of the Berkeley plan.

That the arguments we've been making regarding the existence of a plethora of unfocused, divergent, contradictory, and often functionally unmanageable social expectations and demands being made on education, is relatively easy to document. The best

single piece of evidence in support of this assertion is encompassed in the well-regarded political interpretation of the prevailing social expectations for education in Massachusetts, as published by the State Board of Education in the pamphlet entitled "Educational Goals for Massachusetts." This 1971 publication is the result of extensive efforts on the part of two task forces and one advisory committee and directly involved more than fifty of the most important and influential educators, politicians, religious and community leaders in the state, and indirectly tens of thousands of citizens in the Commonwealth. The widespread acceptance of this document seems indicative of its accuracy in reflecting ten of the major social expectations for our schools.

Perhaps the best way of concretizing these assertions is to list these ten major expectations for education in Massachusetts, as follows:

1. Physical and emotional well being.

2. Basic communication skills.

3. Effective uses of knowledge.

4. Capacity and desire for lifelong learning.

5. Citizenship in a democratic society.

6. Respect for the community of man.

7. Occupational competence.

8. Understanding of the environment.

9. Individual values and attitudes.

10. Creative interests and talents.

These are all certainly laudable goals. Yet a closer examination of this document reveals that the set of goals proposed is, in fact, quite unfeasible, divergent, and contradictory, particularly if viewed in terms of making them operational within a given school. If one were to seriously attempt to envision their implementation within the confines of the present Massachusetts educational structure, the same conflicts in terms of program emphasis, resource allocation, and manageability that we have already discussed in general terms become both specific and readily identifiable.

Peter Drucker puts it this way:

> "And so "school" as the institution in which one "learns" while every place else one "does" -- whether in "play" or in "work" -- is becoming untenable. The baby's crib is equally a "learning institution" as is the job or a severe illness. School not only has to adapt to itself the little we know about how human beings learn, it has to change its image of itself as something apart and quite unrelated to the rest of personality and life to something that organizes, heightens, affirms a central, and existential fact of total human life experience. It will have to restructure itself to be part, a crucial part, of "learning" rather than an isolated, super-imposed mechanism for "education." And "learning" is lifelong rather than the special limbo for those too old to "play" and too young to "work."

"The small school in the rural community of 1860 was educationally a very poor school. The one teacher, no matter how well meaning she might have been, herself knew very little. She spent most of her time keeping order, if not taking off snowsuits. She had very poor tools--even the McGuffy Reader came much later. But this school was part of the community. Everybody in town knew what was going on. There was no need for a "PTA." In fact, the teacher felt herself completely smothered by the community and completely dominated by it.

I do not advocate a return to what we had a century ago--nor is it possible, let alone desirable. But we will again have to bring the community into the school. The community as parents, as taxpayers, as students, has a stake in the school. And the

school, in turn, cannot exist without the community.

American education tomorrow will have to think through who its constituents are. It will have to learn to establish relations with them. It will have to learn, above all, to get across to them what each constituency can and should expect from the school and what the school can and should expect from each constituency."

So then in summary we would like to re-emphasize our contention that the social, political, cultural, and personal influences on education are not only of primary importance to the planning process, but also that these influences and their implicit social expectations and demands lie right at the heart of any attempt to stimulate continued development and reform of the educational system of this country.